

# Kierkegaard and Translation

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The aim of my project is to investigate Kierkegaard and the question of language. I will present two works as the main foundation of language and trans-

lation: *The Concept of Anxiety* and the *Works of Love*. The latter book is itself a work of translation and uses an objective language (writing form and philosophical schemata) to express a subjective thought and a system of meaning. Kierkegaard's books carry a universal message called the law (i.e., love your neighbour as yourself). The law needs to be followed if one desires a better understanding of oneself. Love as a law is also the understanding of the other as the close other who also demands understanding.

The concept of love is not an object which can be held. No one can secure love for themselves. Love can only be substantially experienced through deeds. We perform deeds of love towards this other which one can see and towards that other which one cannot see but knows to exist. The ambiguity between the law

and the practical application of the law requires translation. The individual who struggles in their task to love others and to be a better version of themselves struggles at the same time with the meaning of their task. To believe in one's task is enough for the believer, and yet is not enough for philosophy. No matter how satisfied, the self who believes in its task needs to hold onto some information. The basic units of information need to be in a sense objectively informed to the self. The self, however, embodies in itself the ambiguity of subjectivity and objectivity. As a writer, Kierkegaard transfers his subjective beliefs to an objective form. It is a translation: the transformation of one type of expression into another; however, it can also be called appropriation.

## I. Language and the Self

The task of becoming oneself, according to Kierkegaard, is intrinsically linked with the idea of a personal, individual task. There is no universal specific task for all individuals. Love, however, is universal and works for everyone; therefore, right from the beginning it is possible to see another implication of the subjective-

objective ambiguity. How could the individual understand the task, if she cannot understand what is required of her? How could the task be known if the individual cannot understand the message one conveys? Language helps us to understand the process one goes through because of one's ambiguity. Language also makes clear the expression of these questions one has, if one thinks about how little one knows about what is needed to be done. Kierkegaard is certainly not offering a guide. Kierkegaard simply shed light on the problem of what one needs to know: „*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*“.

In addition to the first light Kierkegaard sheds on the question of „what one knows or needs to know“, he proves the understanding of this commandment to be important. Kierkegaard next translates what he thinks is primordial to the understanding of the human condition: its ambiguous structure of subjective-objective form. Accordingly, Kierkegaard analyses the commandment, trying to figure out the otherwise hidden secrets of the commandment of love. In works such as *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Fear and Trembling*, similarly, the individual understanding strongly affects the actions and, forcefully, the life of the self. It is possible to say at this stage that understanding matters. To become a self requires understanding, whereas an understanding of a profound subjective idea requires translation into an objective form of this idea. The idea of translation ultimately comes from Hamann, whose approach is to understand language acknowledging its natural misunderstanding.

## II. Hamann and The Three Socrates

Hamann was born into the late hours of German Enlightenment. Many of us have had the experience of somehow writing something clever and have had everyone ignore it. What Hamann wrote was not only clever, but dangerous. He got overlooked by everybody – including his friends. Hamann's eccentricity did not look good in the social circles at that particular time in Germany, but Hamann was not someone with desire for popularity. Kierkegaard in his biography looks a lot like Hamann.

The day Hamann was born had nothing to do with his philosophy. He could have been born a week later, but it was from whom he was born that makes his biography interesting for us. He was born of a midwife and a barber surgeon, respectively his mother and father. Hamann's recognition of Socrates and the personal parallel he found in Socrates has much to do with Socrates' mother, another midwife. A vernal speculation such as this can only be verified in Hamann's rainy writings. Kierkegaard also recognized in Socrates a parallel, but his parallel with Socrates was not strictly biographical, but methodological. With Hamann, Kierkegaard also shared a method (metaphorical use of language), the taste for pseudonymous writings, and content-wise, some of Hamann's central ideas.

Hamann, unlike Kierkegaard, wrote very short pieces of writing. He was perhaps against explaining too much given the extension and density of his writings. Explanations would always be difficult for him, following the idea that to use language to explain something is to double the misunderstanding. How-

ever, the use of language seems to be the only way. If language is what first creates misunderstandings between human beings, it is also the only way out: one needs to communicate. Consequently, the misunderstanding of language cannot be ignored, neither can language itself. Kierkegaard thought in a similar manner. I looked through the various similarities between the two authors and was glad to see how much academic work was yet to be done regarding this relationship, especially regarding the treatment of isolated concepts such as Translation and Indirect Communication. I will tackle this first in my upcoming works.

Finally, Hamann seems to have discovered the indirect communication Kierkegaard uses. He acknowledges the process of bringing thought into information as a process of translation. I will demonstrate how Kierkegaard develops the idea of translation on its own. The theory of language Kierkegaard uses is hidden in the text and its nuances, and the eye can be blind to it. The application of translation in Kierkegaard's philosophy seems to be constant: love to deed, demoniac despair to public openness, from secret sacrifice to testimonial of faith. Ultimately, Socrates in his own right represents Kierkegaard's idea of communication. The message Kierkegaard wants to convey is the truth of love and its keen importance to the self. The love Socrates had for his youth and primarily his *philosophia*, the love of knowledge is not the same as love of the neighbor. The love Kierkegaard translates into „the deeds of love“ has not a target and yet every person is object of love. There is (1) Socrates, (2) the Socrates of Königsberg and (3) the Socrates

of Copenhagen, and their relationship is based on three different approaches to knowing.

1. The Socrates who knew nothing.
2. The Socrates who knew the misunderstanding behind understanding.
3. The Socrates who knew the importance of not to know.

### III. Kierkegaard's Task

Meanwhile my aim is to write about Kierkegaard's effort to communicate. In this way, Kierkegaard's communication is Socratic: the highest relation he has with another human being is to translate/appropriate what he deeply believes into an objective form. The Socratic task of Kierkegaard is the communication of the highest sphere of human relationship, which is, I will argue, the concept of love. The task of love is strict and at the same time it cannot be negative. All love, therefore, which is not positive and unselfish but an unhappy form of love; therefore it is a misunderstanding of what love is.

The understanding of language in Kierkegaard is the ground for many well-known ideas that have been already studied in depth, amongst them: anxiety, despair, self-deception. I will show that language needs to be studied as a subject matter itself. Many of the topics presented in Kierkegaard, I believe, have a strong relationship with language. If language is not studied, the difficulties of a philosophical interpretation or an application of any method to analyse Kierkegaard increase drastically. I try ultimately to demonstrate that language needs to be set free from the process of obscurantism it has suffered, which means, language can be identified on many levels, being

as important for Kierkegaard's own task as every other process he introduces in his texts.

Therefore, one could preliminarily conclude that if it is possible to convey the truth, it is only possible through translation. Translation is a necessity in Kierkegaard's philosophy because of the nature of the subjective-objective structure

of the self, the process of thought, and the nature of language. The process of translation happens from a subjective to an objective structure, and from a objective to a subjective form. The process seems to go on like this. Furthermore, if to communicate love is the task for Kierkegaard, to translate/appropriate would be the process to make it possible.